

OF COURSE, ANYONE
WHO'S EVER SERVED
IN THE MILITARY
CAN TELL YOU THIS...

THE FIRST
CASUALTY
OF EVERY
BATTLE...

...IS
ALWAYS
THE
PLAN.

HOLD
UP...

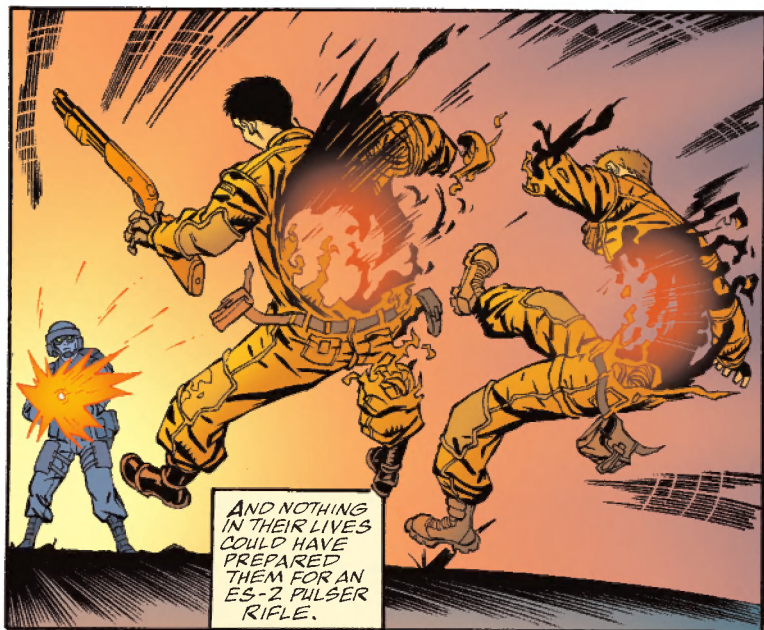
S.A.R.G.E.
HAS SIX PEOPLE
OFF OUR RIGHT
FLANK.

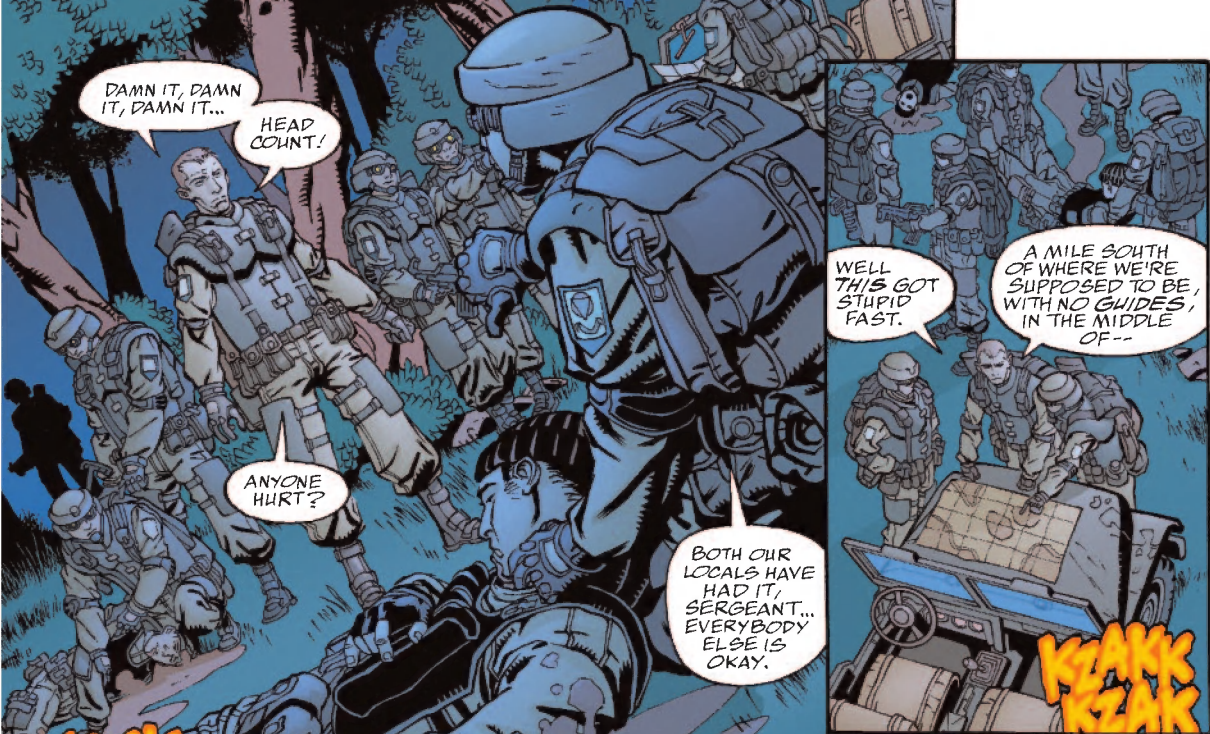
BEHIND
THAT FALLEN
TREE.

HEADS
UP.

KRAK POW

REBEL GUERRILLAS
ON THE TRAIL. USING
M-16s AND OLD
RUSSIAN STUFF
FROM THE SEVENTIES...





DAMN IT, DAMN IT, DAMN IT...

HEAD COUNT!

ANYONE HURT?

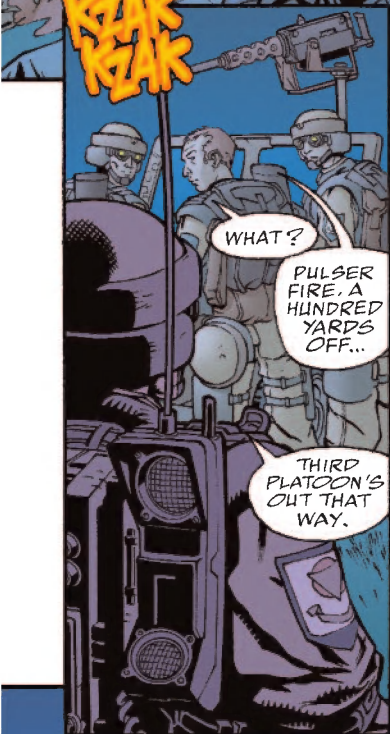
BOTH OUR LOCALS HAVE HAD IT, SERGEANT... EVERYBODY ELSE IS OKAY.

WELL THIS GOT STUPID FAST.

A MILE SOUTH OF WHERE WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE, WITH NO GUIDES, IN THE MIDDLE OF--

KZAKK KZAKK

KZAK KZAK



WHAT?

PULSER FIRE, A HUNDRED YARDS OFF...

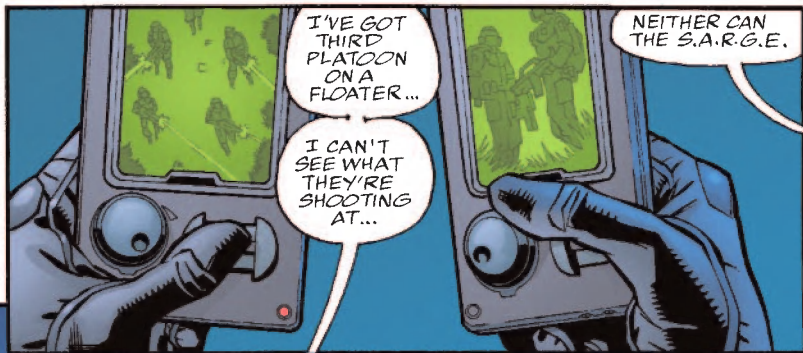
THIRD PLATOON'S OUT THAT WAY.



JUNO THREE, THIS IS JUNO ONE... WHAT IS YOUR SIT-REP?

KZAKK! THE TREES--

THAT'S THE WEST FLANK!



I'VE GOT THIRD PLATOON ON A FLOATER...

I CAN'T SEE WHAT THEY'RE SHOOTING AT...

NEITHER CAN THE S.A.R.G.E.



OKAY, I THINK WE'RE IN IT, GUYS. KEEP ON YOUR NIGHT GOGGLES.

LOOK FOR HEAT SIGNATURES... DURLANS CAN CHANGE SHAPE, BUT NOT TEMPERATURE.

DON'T TRUST YOUR EYES...

SECONDS LATER, AS IF TO TEST SGT. KIYAHANA ADVICE ABOUT OUR EYESIGHT, PRIVATE REYNOLDS FLEW TEN FEET STRAIGHT UP INTO THE AIR.

WHAT?!

THERE WAS NO SOUND OF AN EXPLOSION.

BUT THE FOREST WASN'T SILENT. THERE WAS MUSIC.

A SOFT CHANTING ALL AROUND US.

LOW AND REPETITIVE. STRANGELY PLEASANT.

ANOTHER THIRTY SECONDS, MEN WERE FLYING OFF THE GROUND LEFT AND RIGHT.

LIKE POPCORN.

BRAK!

NO ONE GAVE THE ORDER TO FIRE, BUT IT BEGAN ANYWAY.

WITHOUT TARGETS.

IT WAS INSTANT CHAOS.

THE LARGEST SHAPES NEAR US WERE TREES... SO WE UNLOADED INTO THE FOREST ITSELF. IT MADE SENSE.

**POOM
POOM**

SOME GUYS SHOT AT THE GROUND.

CHAKACHAKA

RATATATATA

FINALLY, WHEN PAGE ROSE INTO THE AIR AND HUNG AT MY SHOULDER AS THOUGH PICKED UP BY INVISIBLE HANDS...

... I FROZE DEAD IN MY TRACKS...

... AND STOPPED TRUSTING THE EYES SUPPLIED TO ME BY THE DEFENCE DEPARTMENT...

... INSTEAD OF MY OWN.

THAT MADE ME THE FIRST
TO SEE THE ENEMY...

KELLY...

HELP...
ME...

KKGHH--

THE THING
HOLDING
PAGE WAS
EIGHT FEET
TALL...

WITH FIRE
FOR EYES...

BONE
WHITE
SKIN...



GLEAMING
CARNIVOROUS
TEETH THAT
BOUNCED AND
GLITTERED AS
THE CREATURE
CHANTED ITS
LOW, ALLURING
SONG...



I CAUGHT
MYSELF
STARING AT
THE EYES...

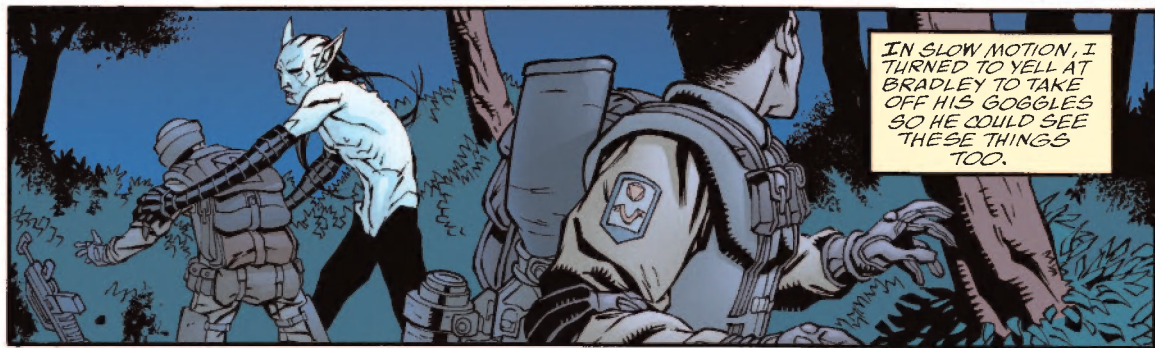
...WONDERING
WHY A HEAT
SOURCE LIKE
THAT WOULDN'T
HAVE
REGISTERED
ON INFRA-
RED...

FINDING IT ALL SO
CURIOUS AND
FASCINATING...

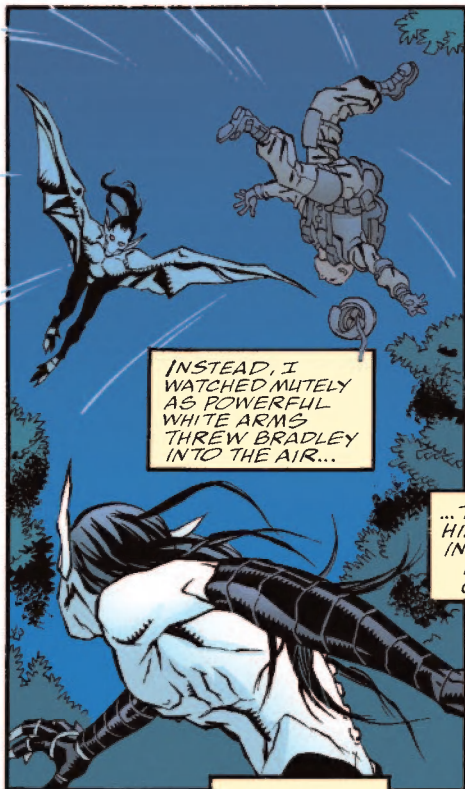


WHEN I SAW MY ARM
REACHING FOR MY
PULSER RIFLE...

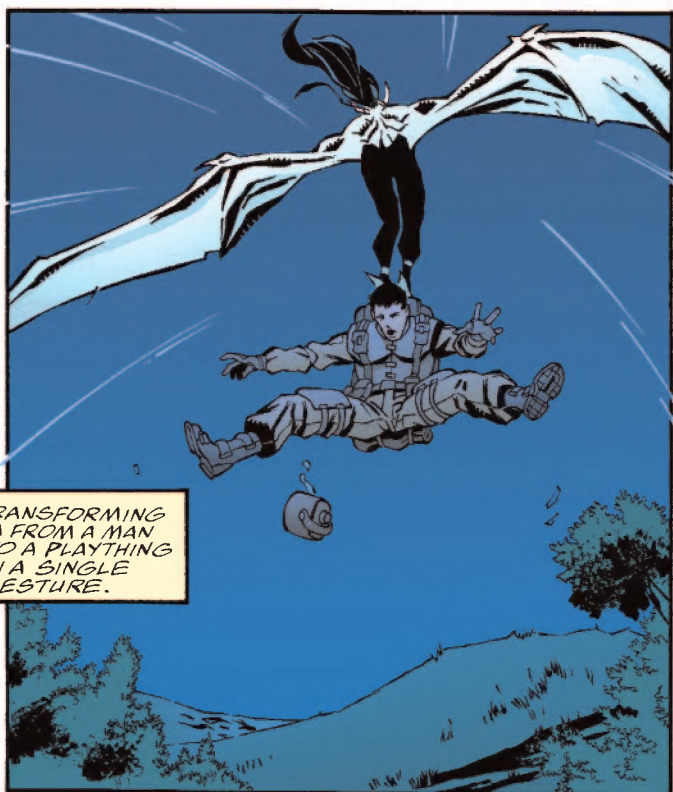
AS SOON AS I
NOTICED IT, MY ARM
STOPPED MOVING.
I DON'T KNOW WHY.



IN SLOW MOTION, I
TURNED TO YELL AT
BRADLEY TO TAKE
OFF HIS GOGGLES
SO HE COULD SEE
THESE THINGS
TOO.



INSTEAD, I
WATCHED MUTELY
AS POWERFUL
WHITE ARMS
THREW BRADLEY
INTO THE AIR...



...TRANSFORMING
HIM FROM A MAN
INTO A PLAYTHING
IN A SINGLE
GESTURE.



IT WAS THEN
I REALIZED
THAT A FULL
MINUTE HAD
GONE BY...



...AND I
HADN'T
MOVED A
MUSCLE...